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ABSTRACT

A professor from the University of Tennessee and a mathematics teacher who formerly taught kindergarten teamed up to plan and teach a kindergarten methods course for undergraduate elementary education majors. The course includes both practical and theoretical perspectives. Course readings consist of selections from textbooks and articles from professional journals. For each of the assigned journal articles, students are required to write a summary, a personal reaction, and a statement of implications for educators. Other assignments involve interacting with kindergarten children, developing a learning center, preparing a comprehensive thematic unit plan, and keeping a journal. Class activities include lectures; small group work; media presentations; presentations by guest speakers; demonstrations; and familiarization with materials used by kindergarten children that relate to science, mathematics, movement, and music. Evaluation of the students and instructors is an integral facet of the course. The course instructors seek to demonstrate the connections between university and school perspectives and to facilitate learning in both theoretical and practical dimensions. Student evaluations have revealed that students value the course's emphasis on a practical perspective, while their coursework suggests that students are successful in applying their theoretical understandings in practical ways. Another benefit of the course is improved cooperation between universities and schools. The two instructors feel professionally validated through their work together. (AC)

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MAKING A KINDERGARTEN METHODS COURSE MAKE MORE SENSE: A TEACHER AND PROFESSOR TEAM UP

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Making a Kindergarten Methods Course Make More Sense:
A Teacher and Professor Team Up

The purpose of this paper is to describe the experience of a teacher and professor working together to plan and teach a kindergarten methods course for undergraduate elementary education majors. The paper will discuss our goal of including practical and theoretical perspectives in the class and describe how we worked together to make the course more meaningful to preservice teachers. We hope other teacher educators and teachers will find the paper interesting because it details a model of cooperation between practitioners and professors and discusses the practical matters of setting up and implementing this unusual team teaching approach.

In this paper we will describe: (1) Our rationale for working together; (2) The content of our kindergarten methods course; (3) Our teaching roles in the course; and (4) Our evaluation of the benefits of team teaching with teachers and professors.

History and Rationale

The University of Tennessee, like many other institutions, is trying to find ways to improve its teacher preparation programs. A guiding principle in that effort is to involve highly effective practitioners as much as possible in the program. This atmosphere made it possible to arrange for Emily, a former kindergarten teacher and current traveling math teacher, to join Amos, an early childhood

professor, in planning and teaching the kindergarten methods course required of all elementary education students seeking kindergarten certification.

Because the class was scheduled during the day, the initial arrangements were that the university paid the school system for the time Emily spent away from her regular duties. The class has since been moved to late afternoon and Emily is paid directly as an instructor. We know of other colleges and universities where other arrangements have been made so that teachers can be released to work with preservice teachers (in one case, the university pays the school system the amount necessary to hire a new teacher, while an experienced teacher is released to work full time with the university). Our experience is that such creative arrangements are worth the effort.

Our rationale for including both a teacher and a professor in methods course teaching is tied to two kinds of integration: Bringing together practice and theory; and Improving university and school connections. We want to expose our students to both practical and theoretical-research knowledge; but more, we want them to see the interconnectedness of these domains of information. We want to show those connections in the assignments we give and activities we prepare, but we also want to model the application of those connections in all that we do and say. We want our team to be a master practitioner who knows about and uses research and theory in her work and an active researcher-theoretician who respects and utilizes practical knowledge. We want to be models of professional

educators who use their knowledge of research, theory, and practice to make sound decisions for children.

In the same way we want to connect practice with theory and research, we try to demonstrate better connections between university and school contexts. It is our experience that most teachers feel distant from what goes on at the university and that most professors feel disconnected from what happens in schools. We know that students do not see close connections between what they experience on campus and in the field. By presenting ourselves as a team, we demonstrate that connections can be made and that those connections can be beneficial to universities, schools, and especially to students.

Course Content

Our course is a three semester hour course that students typically take early in their professional sequence. We will organize our description here into brief discussions of: readings, assignments, projects, journals, activities, media presentations, guest speakers, demonstrations, sharing sessions, hands-on experiences, and evaluations (a sample syllabus is included at the end of this paper).

Reading assignments for the course consist of selections from textbooks as well as articles from professional journals. Textbooks used include NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs and The Whole Language Kindergarten by Raines and Canady.

Students are asked to complete a variety of assignments during the semester. For each of the assigned journal readings, the student writes: (a) a summary of the article; (b) a personal reaction to the article; and (c) a statement of implications for educators based on the reading.

Two of the most meaningful assignments involve interaction with kindergarten children. The first of these requires that the students conduct Piagetian conservation tasks with individual children and then complete a written summary of the experience. For the other, the student must observe in a kindergarten classroom and submit a written report, including such items as a diagram of the classroom, a summary of activities, and comments on classroom climate, discipline, centers, materials, etc.

There are two major projects assigned during the semester. The first of these is to develop a learning center that would be appropriate for use by kindergarten students. Each student prepares a written description of his/her center to give to classmates. It is an exciting day (or two) when all the centers are set up for sharing. The second major project involves developing a comprehensive thematic unit plan. One requirement of this assignment is a planning web, which is duplicated and shared with classmates. As a result of this sharing, students have an extensive collection of ideas for both centers and units by the end of the semester.

One additional assignment is on-going in nature. Students are asked to keep a journal, which should consist of a minimum of one entry for class meeting. We encourage the students to include

thoughtful reflection on and analysis of what is being learned in class.

Although traditional lectures are included in our class presentations, numerous other activities are utilized as well. Students are encouraged to participate frequently in discussions, both as a total class and in small groups. For example, one effective activity we have used involves assigning small groups of students to different topics from NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice handbook. The students are asked to take the role of teachers planning for a parent meeting early in the school year. After the small groups meet and plan, they report to the other students, who assume the role of parents attending the meeting. Small groups are often used for discussion of assignments. For example, after the classroom observation, small groups share their experiences, and then each group reports the highlights of their discussion to the entire class. In this way, everyone gets to share, and the atmosphere is non-threatening to reluctant speakers.

Media presentations are another technique we use in class. During our first class meeting, for example, we show slides of kindergartners involved in a variety of activities as one of us reads the familiar passage from Robert Fulghum's All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten. Videos on topics such as cognitive development, classroom management, and whole language are also shown on occasion.

Guest speakers have been especially popular and effective with our students. The "Kids on the Block" puppet team presented a skit on children with disabilities, a movement specialist involved them

in activities appropriate for kindergartners, and an elementary music teacher taught songs and other music activities. Probably the favorite classes for the students, however, have been visits by kindergarten teachers (both experienced and first-year teachers). The teachers give a flavor for how they set up their programs and share some of their favorite ideas, and the students are given an opportunity to ask questions. It is always a worthwhile experience for both the students and the teachers.

Demonstrations are another integral part of the course. One of the most interesting of these is a demonstration of Piagetian-type tasks which are challenging for most adults. This is done on the day the Piagetian task assignment is made, and it helps the students understand more readily how children might respond to the Piagetian task experience. Another popular demonstration is that of writing an experience story. The students participate in an engaging experience and then dictate a story to the instructor, who records it.

Sessions in which materials are shared are a vital part of this course. We share examples of curriculum materials (including those of the state and local systems, as well as commercial materials), professional books and journals, children's literature, hands-on materials, actual student work (writing, artwork, graphs, etc.), photograph albums, and so forth. The students, in turn, share their centers and units in class.

Some of the most important experiences we provide our students are those which are first-hand in nature. Included among these are science and mathematics experiences, as well as those previously alluded to, such as movement and music activities. In

these experiences, students are presented with materials and activities just as kindergarten children receive them. Students have a chance to explore and learn in the ways we want them to use with young children.

Evaluation (of the students and of the instructors) is an integral and on-going facet of our course. Students are evaluated by both instructors on all assignments. In addition, students take four quizzes based on material from the readings and from class. Students' class participation is also considered by the instructors. While student evaluation is a necessary part of any course, evaluation of the instructors is equally important. This is accomplished both formally and informally. Student journal entries are a major source of feedback to the instructors. Not only are reactions to activities and assignments helpful for planning, but the quality of student reflection is an indicator of how successful we have been in reaching our goals as instructors. Another valuable form of evaluation is the continuous feedback the instructors offer one another. Following almost every class meeting, we discuss, analyze, and offer suggestions for improvement. Two forms of summative evaluation are available to students when the course is complete. These evaluations are studied in an effort to improve our teaching.

Teaching Roles

In our teaching, we want to demonstrate connectedness between university and school perspectives. We try to divide equally responsibilities for accomplishing the many tasks

associated with delivering the content described above. Amos takes the lead on activities and assignments that are more theoretical than practical, while Emily has primary responsibility for the more practical aspects of the course. This does not mean that Emily covers only the practical and Amos only the theoretical; both try to facilitate learning in both dimensions.

The notion at the base of our thinking is that professional practice involves the application of practical and theoretical-research knowledge. Amos emphasizes the place of theory and research in professional practice, Emily the importance of practical knowledge. Although one takes primary responsibility for the practical or theoretical, both try to emphasize the value of the other. By having instructors with different points of view valuing and applying the perspective of the other, students can better see relationships between theory and practice.

It is important to note that we do not do "turn teaching." We are a team that works together from the beginning planning stages to the final evaluations. We both have a hand in all decisions related to the course and we are present and participating in all classroom activities. We explicitly seek to demonstrate the power of cooperation in all of our interactions with students, in class and out.

Benefits

We see several benefits from our experience of team teaching a methods course for early childhood educators. From our end-of-course student evaluations and from comments in student journals, it is clear that students value very highly Emily's emphasis on the

practical. It is their perception that most of their university courses, including their methods courses, do not pay sufficient attention to the practical aspects of teaching "in the real world." They are convinced that Emily's contribution gives them a head start on being successful in their internship and beginning teaching experiences.

Based on our observations of the workings of the class and the products of our students' efforts, we believe that students are making better connections between theoretical and practical knowledge. Learning center and unit activities reveal the ability to integrate not only content, but to make applications of theoretical understandings through activities that are appropriate for implementation in real early childhood settings. Many student journal entries indicate that students' appreciation for theoretical and research knowledge has been improved through experiences in the course.

Cooperation between universities and schools has been improved and positive interchange facilitated. As a traveling math teacher, Emily has contact with many teachers and administrators in the school system. She gets the chance to see many university students as they are placed in schools she visits and she is recognized as a colleague by many professors at the university. Her visibility and contacts strengthen the message sent to everyone involved: universities and schools do not have to be separate, even antagonistic institutions; they can work together to the benefit of both. Relatedly, both Amos and Emily have learned a great deal about the workings of the bureaucracies of both institutions and

discovered that, although cumbersome, good ideas like the one described here can find support from both directions.

On a more personal level, Emily and Amos have been professionally validated by working together. Team teaching has forced us to examine our own assumptions about theory and practice and what makes for sound teacher education practice. The experience has been stimulating and rewarding. To teach in front of someone from the other side of the professional street has been a little threatening for both of us: Emily wondering if she "knows" enough to teach at the college level; and Amos worrying that the stereotypes associated with "ivory towerism" will be revealed in his teaching. The tension turns out to be a good thing, forcing us to be more reflective about what we say and do.

Although we recognize that ours is a special case and only one way to team teachers with professors, we would suggest that others try their own models of such an arrangement. Helping to prepare the next generation of professionals is an inherent responsibility of any profession. Systematically including practitioners in more of that preparation reduces the artificial boundaries that separate theory from practice and universities from schools. Our experience tells us that teaming like ours will benefit students, instructors, institutions, the teaching profession, and finally, the young children we serve.

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C&I 445
Program Development and Teaching
In Kindergarten
Fall, 1991
University of Tennessee

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Overview

This course is designed to provide students the opportunity to develop an understanding of the young child and kindergarten curriculum. The primary focus of this course is to help students develop a personal teaching philosophy based on current theory, research, and practice. Furthermore, this course will assist students in developing appropriate techniques and selecting appropriate teaching materials to enhance the learning of young children.

Objectives:

Students will:

(1) demonstrate knowledge of predominant early childhood education theories and theorists,
(2) describe relationships between educational theories and classroom practices,
(3) demonstrate the ability to critique various instructional strategies in terms of potential effectiveness and appropriateness for young children,
(4) develop a personal philosophy of early childhood education based on research and theory,
(5) demonstrate knowledge of a variety of classroom organizations and management procedures appropriate for young children,
(6) demonstrate understandings of ways ethnic, cultural, and language differences can be accommodated and ways the needs of handicapped children can be met in the classroom,
(7) demonstrate the ability to apply principles of whole language and developmentally appropriate practice when planning learning experiences related to science, math, language arts, social studies, and the visual and performing arts,
(8) demonstrate the ability to prepare learning centers and integrated units of instruction.

Methods of Evaluation:

(1) Class Participation (5%) -- To get full credit for participation, students must be in class and actively participate in activities and discussions.

(2) Journals (5%) -- Students will keep journals in which they describe and reflect on what they are learning in class. Journals will be turned in twice during the semester and again at the end.

(3) Reading Cards (15%) -- Several articles on reserve in the Curriculum Lab are assigned readings. For each article, a reading card is required. Each reading card will be completed on a 5x8 card following a format prescribed by the instructors.

(4) Quizzes (40%) -- Four quizzes covering course material will be given. Each quiz will count for 10% of the course grade and will include multiple choice, short answer, and matching type questions.

(5) Assignments (20%) -- The completion of three assignments connected with course objectives is required.

(6) Final Unit Plan (15%) -- Students will complete a comprehensive unit plan using the framework prescribed in class.

Required Texts:

Raines, S.C., & Canady, R.J. The Whole Language Kindergarten. Teachers College Press, 1990.

Bredekamp, S., (Ed.) Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs, Expanded Edition, 1987.

Class Schedule:

Date	Topic	Assignments
August 22	Introduction/Syllabus	
August 27	Philosophies of Education/ Theories of Learning and Development	* Schickedanz et al Chapter
August 29	Theories of Learning and Development/Piaget Film	
Sept. 3	Developmentally Appropriate Practice	DAP Part 1
Sept. 5	Developmentally Appropriate Practice	DAP Parts 5 & 7
Sept. 10	QUIZ #1/Teaching in Kindergarten	
Sept. 12	Formal vs. Developmental Education	* Elkind Article/ Piagetian Task Assignment Due
Sept. 17	Philosophy-Reality Conflicts	* Hatch & Freeman Article
Sept. 19	Kindergarten Curriculum	* Katz Article/Journals Due
Sept. 24	Curriculum Materials	* Seefeldt Article
Sept. 26	Classroom Observations in Schools	
Oct. 1	Discussion of Observations	Observation Assignment Due
Oct. 3	Learning Centers	* Myers & Mauer Article
Oct. 8	QUIZ #2	
Oct. 10	Fall Break	

Date	Topic	Assignments
Oct. 15	Whole Language and Language Experience	Chapters 1 & 2
Oct. 17	Writing Development	Chapter 5
Oct. 22	Reading Development	Chapter 6
Oct. 24	Thematic Units & Social Studies	Chapter 7 Journals Due
Oct. 25	Math	Chapter 12
Oct. 31	Share Learning Centers	Learning Center Assignment Due
Nov. 5	QUIZ #3/Science	
Nov. 7	Science/Unit Planning Feedback	Chapter 8
Nov. 12	The Arts	Chapters 9 & 10
Nov. 14	Organizing, Evaluating, & Managing	Chapters 4 & 11
Nov. 19	Tips for Getting Started	Chapter 3
Nov. 21	Survival Skills	Chapter 13
Nov. 26	Philosophies of Education Revisited	
Nov. 28	Thanksgiving	
Dec. 3	FINAL UNIT PLANS DUE/ Share Units	Journals Due
Dec. 5	FINAL READING QUIZ	

*Reading Cards Required